

Arrows

When I was in a pub in on Long Island, I went to use the restrooms. When I was in the stall, I saw writing on the door that said: “follow the arrows”.

I looked around, but I didn’t see any arrows. Whatever, I didn’t think about it.

Then, about a month after that, I’m back in the same place- use the restroom to wash my hands before I tear into some buffalo wings.

They were out of paper towels, and not wanting to touch the restroom door with my hands, I tried to open it with my elbows. This was a clumsy processes, and resulted in my bumping a lightswitch with my elbow. The room went completely dark.

Or did it?

On the ceiling I notice a trail of glow-in-the-dark arrows painted onto the ceiling. They’re very very faded, looks like they’d been there for quite a while. The led out the door.

Now I had totally forgotten about the graffiti I had read a month ago, so I didn’t really think about those arrows at all. I just pulled my sleeve over my wet hand, used it to flip the switch back on, and open the door.

I went back to my table with some buddies and we chowed down on some excellent wings. It wasn’t until the end of the evening when my brain, out of nowhere, remember the “follow the arrows” graffiti in the stall. I excuse myself from the table, just to check that it was this stall where I saw the writing. It was. Now I had a mystery.

I wanted to follow the arrows, but I couldn’t. After I left the restroom, the ambient light was so bright that the arrows were invisible.

I told my friends about the arrows, and I asked the bartender about it. He knew about the graffiti but had never seen the glow-in-the-dark arrows. After about 15 minutes of pouring drinks, he took a minute to go check it out.

He didn't seem that impressed. I asked him if we could stay after closing and turn off all the lights to see where it went. He said yes.

Flash forward 2 hours. The bartender and some of the waitresses are all standing around in the dark of the bar, looking at little faded arrows that make a trail from the restroom out to the front door.

We step outside, but the trail is dead. The streetlights outside make the faded glow in the dark arrows impossible to see- if they were even there at all.

3 days later, I'm in the Geology I at my college, when I notice the display of exotic minerals that the department has in a display case. Inside the case is a small, handheld black light used by rock hounds to find and observe glow-in-the-dark minerals. After the class, I ask the professor if I can borrow it. He says yes, but that if I break it I owe the department \$45.

Flash forward 9 hours. I drag my buddies back to the bar. We have some more drinks and awesome buffalo wings. When we're done gorging ourselves it is already dark outside.

I went to the bathroom and tested my black light on some of the painted arrows. It worked like a charm- they glowed incredibly brightly, and even with the lights on they were fairly visible.

I went back to the table. We pay our tab, and step onto the street.

My friends stood around me, trying to look cool, while I was geeking out with my black light searching for invisible arrows on the ground. I found one.

I followed the arrow, keeping my black light inches from the ground, waving it back and forth... 5 feet away I found another arrow. Then another, and another still.

I was following these arrows down a side walk for about 2 blocks. My friends finally loosened up and started speculating on where the hell these arrows were taking us.

Finally I got to an arrow pointing us in a new direction... it was a driveway leading to an empty commercial lot of some kind. The lot was surrounded by cyclone fences with aluminum siding- we couldn't see what was inside.

The arrows led us around the fence/wall to a gate.

I saw a lot of glow-in-the-dark paint under my light, and it took me a few seconds and some swinging of the light to realize we were looking at a giant arrow pointing inside the fence.

I guess I should introduce you to my friends now: One was Jeff, one was Dave.

Jeff, pushed on the gate. It was locked and it rattled terribly in the dark. Dave looked uncomfortable. He took a deep breath, and before he could say what I'm certain he was about to ("hey guys lets just go home") I cut him off, "I say we hop this baby".

Jeff didn't even say anything before he leapt against the gate, getting a firm handhold at the top. Ungracefully, but successfully, he pulled himself to an uncomfortable straddle on top of the gate.

I followed suit, leaping at the gate. I didn't reach the top on my first attempt. I put the black light in my pocket and took a running leap at the gate I got a firm handhold, but I could feel the metal digging into my skin. I made a mental note to get a tetanus shot when this was all over.

Jeff helped me up from the top while Dave pushed my legs from

underneath. Dave followed next with surprising ease.

From our perch on the gate, we could see that the fence surrounded what looked like an old parking lot. Grass and other green things sprang up from the ancient, crumbled asphalt.

Immediately below us, on the other side of the fence, was nothing but inky blackness from the shadow cast by the gate from a nearby street lamp. I pulled my black light from my pocket, but from this height, it was useless.

To my surprise, Dave was the first one to slide down into the dark. He slid down the fence as low as possible before letting go and taking the final plunge. We heard him stumble, curse quietly, and the stand.

"It's okay," he said, "I can see a little. It's just asphalt."

Jeff and I dropped down from the fence. I didn't see exactly what happened, but after a lot of cursing, Jeff announced to us that he had busted his knee. After a minute of silent deliberation, he decided we should soldier on.

I pulled out my light and quickly found an arrow.

We followed a new trail slowly, and it quickly became clear that we were being led to a small shack in the middle of the parking lot.

"I know what this is," said Dave. "I think this all used to be a drive-in movie theater. I think that is the concession stand."

Jeff and I agreed that this was a pretty good theory.

We walked to the building, and as we got closer, saw that it was boarded up. But the shape of it, and its enormous ply-board-covered windows made us think that Dave was probably right.

Jeff pulled out a cellphone and held it high above his head. At first

I couldn't figure out why- then it became clear that he was using it as a flashlight to illuminate some faded lettering on the wall. We couldn't really see it, but we decided it probably said "POPCORN".

I held up my black light- it glowed purple and bright, but didn't help us read the lettering any better than Jeff's phone had. I scanned the ground for more arrows and found none.

Dave shrugged, "So, what? The arrows used to lure people to buy popcorn?"

"Looks like," Jeff said.

We walked around the building until we came to a door in the back. It was secured by an old combination padlock. My black light hung from a tie on my wrist. I thought I had shut it off now that our mystery was solved, but out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of glowing paint.

I aimed my light at it.

"Whoa!" said Dave. Maybe we all said it- we were thinking it.

There on the door, in sharp, new glowing paint was scrawled "1-3-5-6".

Holding the black light close, we quickly rotated the wheels on the lock. Jeff pulled it open with a satisfying click.

Pulling the padlock aside, we pushed on the old door. It creaked ominously... and got stuck when it was about a third of the way open.

Jeff kicked his foot around the inside and moved an obstruction with thud. The door opened halfway now, and Jeff peeked inside.

"I can't see anything," he said.

I peeked inside the door, shining my black light. It was useless. I

cursed myself for not bring a real flashlight. A black light and a cell phone were not enough to explore in there.

"It's useless," I said, as I pulled back from the door.

Dave took his turn peering in. Just as I was about to suggest we head back to return another day, I heard a click, and a dim light appeared within the building.

"Holy shit," said Dave, "I flipped the light switch, but I never thought in a million years that it would work."

Jeff said, "Yeah, this place looks like it's been out of use for like-30 years, at least! Look at this parking lot! There are trees in it!"

"Someone's still paying the bills," I said, and pushed on Dave to get him headed into the building.

We walked in, and saw a surprisingly clean concession stand interior. There was thin coating of that strange sort of dust that accumulates in the absence of people... The sort of dust you would expect to find in an ancient tomb.

The shelves were empty, and a cabinet stood on the far side of the room, doors closed. Dave walked to it and opened it cautiously.

"Holy, goat fucker," he said. He always had an interesting way with words. I looked past him to see what had impressed him.

"Jeezus," I agreed. We were looking at shelves and shelves packed with candy boxes. But not just any candy boxes- really old stuff- I recognized Cracker-Jacks and Hershey's but the labels were ancient.

I dropped my black light on the floor and grabbed excitedly for a giant box of Necco-Waffers. "This has to be worth something," I said.

Before I could examine further, Jeff said, "Dudes, check this out!"

He was standing over a hatch in the floor. He'd pulled it up and was peering into the dark. "Maybe there's another light down there?"

He bounded down a set of steps into the cellar. Dave and I followed close behind, trying to find a switch along the way.

If I hadn't been in such a hurry to keep up with Jeff, I might have noticed that the black light I had dropped was illuminating some more glowing paint. And if I had noticed that, I might also have noticed that the paint made an arrow was pointing directly towards this basement hatch. And if I had noticed that, it might have given me pause. But I did not notice these things.

I was halfway to the bottom of the stairs when I heard a click. My eyes were immediately drawn to a glow in the corner of the basement. Jeff said, "found it."

We walked toward the light, bumping into empty shelves and some strange debris along the way. Canvas bags, like sacks of potatoes. They were covered in dust. I was more concerned with the shelf under the light. It held what I recognized as old film canisters. Truly these were treasure.

We hurried over, reading the titles. Lots of things with monsters, "Dracula Returns", "Night of the Wolf People" - great stuff. But I didn't recognize any of the titles.

We all jumped when we heard it.

There was whirring sound... very loud, coming from near the stairs. It sounded somehow familiar, like a garbage disposal or some electric power tool. We saw the shadows changing from the light in the hatchway.

We had nearly knocked over the shelf with the film reels. I had involuntarily thrown my hands over my ears. Dave and Jeff had

comical , frightened expressions on their faces. I probably looked the same.

At last the sound stopped. We stood still for a moment, our hearts beating hard in our chests.

Then, as if awakening from a trance, we all ran over to the hatch to investigate. My mind could not comprehend what it saw. Was the ceiling upstairs covered in black stripes?

NO. My eyes finally understood. The hatch we had just come down moments ago was now blocked by iron bars.

Jeff bolted up the stairs as far as he could, grasping the iron bars in his hands and pushing against them violently. But his shaking and jarring only served to rattle the creaky wooden staircase.

Dave stood there, pale and dumb, staring at the bars. His mind trying to comprehend this impossible situation.

I walked to the back of the stairs and saw the motorized contraption attached to iron bars. It was so dark though, that I could barely make it out.

I reached for my black light, realizing that I had left it upstairs. "Jeff! Get over here!" I barked.

Jeff stood next to me and looked at the contraption. He held up his cell phone and in the phone's dim light we saw a giant metal box that had been cleverly mounted to the basement ceiling. If there were way to access this device, we could not see it.

Dave gasped suddenly, and ran to one of the potato sacks I'd seen on the floor. He dragged it into the light, worked to untie it. When he was done, I saw him look into the bag and make a sound I'd never heard before- something between a scream and a moan. He started hyperventilating.

Jeff and I ran over to him. Jeff said some comforting words to Dave

while I looked into the bag.

At first I couldn't tell what I was looking at. For some reason I thought it was tree roots or some sort of stew vegetables. Then I saw the hair.

I vomited violently, away from the others.

I tried to speak, but vomited again. Throat raw, I said to Jeff, "your phone! call the police, call them now!"

I put my hand on Dave's shoulder. Dave who was slowly rocking back and forth like a baby. He was trying to slow down his breathing, but it was coming quickly in gasping rasps.

I heard Jeff get through to someone on the phone. He explained where the bar was, and how we had walked several blocks to a parking lot with a fence around it. He explained the concession stand, and the basement and the locking iron bars.

They wanted him to stay on the line, I asked him for the phone.

"Look," I said, "there are dead bodies in bags down here-" I looked around. "-dozens of them."

It was a woman on the other end. She said, "Just stay calm. I want you to just stay on line with me, and give me your names."

We told her who we were, and answered her check list of questions. I knew we should conserve the phone batteries, but she was our lifeline out of this crazy situation.

After we'd answered all her questions, she said, "You know, making prank calls to emergency rescue services is a very serious crime."

My blood turned cold. She thought we were joking. My throat tightened.

As calmly as I could, I croaked, "Ma'am I swear to you, I have never been more serious in my life. Please send someone down here. If we're lying you can arrest us- just send someone PLEASE."

"Young man," she said, "don't you have better things to do on a school night?"

I heard a click- then nothing.

I hung up the phone. "She... didn't believe us"

Dave said, "give me the phone."

I noticed he had calmed down significantly.

I saw him dial the operator. In a moment he spoke. Calmly he said, "operator, I'd like to speak to New Hyde Park police please. Yes, it is an emergency. No I don't want 9-1-1 or dispatch. I want the police department."

There was a moment's silence. Then he spoke in a deep voice, "Yes, hello officer, I'd like to report some kids in an abandoned building. They were throwing bottles and wrecking the place. I saw them drag a little girl in there into the basement- it sounds awful bad- just awful bad. Someone needs to hurry before they hurt that little girl."

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[–]flossdaily 1310 points 1 year ago*

Dave- fucking brilliant Dave. I could have kissed him. He gave the officer the location of the lot and the description. It was perfect. After answering some more the officers questions, he begged her once again to hurry. But already I heard the sound of a car pulling up outside.

Dave hung up the phone. "That was too fast," he said.

“Maybe the 9-1-1 lady actually sent someone? To arrest us maybe?”

I heard a car door open, then close, then there were heavy steps. Jeff ran to the barred hatch, “We’re down here! Help! Please! We’re down here!”

The footsteps were slow and deliberate overhead. I saw a pair of work boots and dirty bluejeans appear at the top of the stairs.

Jeff stepped clumsily backwards down the stairs. He looked pale. I moved to the base of the stairs by his side, and looked up.

He was a bear of a man. Just intimidatingly large. He was smoking a cigarette. He stared at us without really seeing us- as if we were just shirts on a hanger and he was trying to decide which one to wear.

“Excuse me,” I said. But he walked away as if he hadn’t heard me.

“HEY! HEY!” I screamed as I ran up the stairs to the bars, but I could think of nothing else to say... he walked outside.

We heard him get something heavy out of his vehicle. Then we heard him dragging it inside. Whatever it was, he set it down with a thump.

There was some fussing about upstairs, and then we saw plastic tarp rolled across the iron bars. moments later, the sound of duct tape.

The hatch was closed, and we were alone listening to the sounds of the man working. Working, we were sure, on something evil. The sort of evil that is rarely seen. The sort of evil that you don’t get to tell anyone about later on.

We heard a hissing sound- high pitched and steady.

I was confused, so was Jeff.

“Gas,” said Dave. “I think he’s pumping some sort of gas in here.”

We ran around looking for the source. But we were lightheaded within minutes.

I heard Jeff collapse in the far corner. Dave rushed over and tried to pull him over to me.

Dave fell 10 feet away from me, breathing shallowly, unconscious but not dead.

I heard sirens in the distance. And then there was nothing.

There is an epilogue below, but I recommend you just continue reading here

When I awoke, I realized two things about my face. The first thing was that it hurt a lot. The second thing was that it was on a concrete floor.

I tried to sit upright, but as I pushed myself from the floor my arms gave out on me. I was so weak. My head weighed 100 pounds.

I heard grunting and coughing behind me. Startled, I rolled over and saw Dave as he began to come around. There was a moment of confusion as I looked around the dusty room. Then it all snapped back in place.

Adrenaline pumping, my muscles found new strength. I grabbed Dave’s collar, “Dave, we’ve got to get the fu-“

I stopped midsentence as I heard voices upstairs.

The first voice said, “Excuse me sir, we’ve had reports of a disturbance out here. Have you heard anything unusual?”

There was very long pause, and then a baritone voice said, “yes sir, officer... there were some kids in this place making a hell of a racket... I came over here to clear ‘em out.”

The police officer asked, “you own this property?”

But the man didn’t get a chance to answer because I started screaming bloody murder. Dave joined me. Jeff stirred, but I was too busy running up the stairs and pounding on the hatch to pay him any attention.

Dave grabbed a couple of metal film canisters and smashed them together, making an unholy racket.

If any more dialog was exchanged upstairs, we didn’t hear it. What we did hear was the scuffle that ensued. The men upstairs were slamming each other into the walls. One of them fell to the floor. There was a heavy thud, a gunshot, and then another. Finally we heard a second body slump to the floor.

We all stayed silent for a moment, praying the police officer was triumphant. We heard nothing.

“Officer?” I shouted through the hatch.

I heard a moan. Then, “I... I think I’m hurt... I think... I think...” and then there was nothing.

“Officer?!” I shouted again, and pounded on the hatch. There was no response.

Jeff and Dave were behind me at the base of the stairs. Dave said, “we need to get the hatch open.”

There was more stirring upstairs from the direction of the second thud. I was pretty sure it was our captor. My heart pounded.

I heard something smash in the dark of the basement. I spun to see Dave destroying a metal shelf. He ripped off a sturdy, narrow

metal support piece and then ran up the stairs until he was beside me.

Dave wedged the metal piece through the iron bars, and pushed upwards against the hatch. In the process, he created a small rip in the tarp that had been duct-taped over the opening. I immediately began clawing at the thick plastic like a crazed cat.

Jeff followed Dave's lead and grabbed another piece of the destroyed shelf, wedged it between the iron bars, and pushed.

We heard the welcome groan of bending wood, followed by a delightful snap. The hatch, and part of its frame swung upwards a few inches. It was clear that something was on top of the hatch.

I pushed through the bars with my bare hands, as Jeff and Dave redoubled their efforts. We heard something heavy and metallic crash over on its side. The hatch door swung open, allowing the us to see the scene above.

A police officer lay a several feet away from where we stood. Something was sticking out of the side of his head. A kitchen knife! It was ghastly. The worst part was the man's eyes. They were alert! He was looking at me.

It was clear that he could not speak and his right hand, still grasping a small revolver, was experiencing some sort of rhythmic tremor.

The officer kept shifting his eyes from my gaze to a point somewhere behind me. He did this twice before I understood. I turned to where he wanted me to look. Against the far wall, the large bear of a man was trying to use the wall to pull himself to an upright position. The man had been shot in the leg, and in the shoulder. He looked pale but determined.

I reached out for the officer's gun. His eyes tried to tell me something. He wanted to hand me the gun but could not. His mouth opened and closed like a fish. An awful gibberish came out-

something that wanted to be words, but were spilling forth from a dying brain.

I strained my arm to its limit, feeling the iron bars pressing into my flesh. My fingertip touched the barrel of the gun but I couldn't quite reach it. The cop made another awful sound and flexed his torso. His body lurched closer to me and I gripped the gun firmly. I pulled it from the officer's hand, and quickly reoriented myself to point it at the large man. The bars made this a difficult task, and by the time I got my arm facing the right direction, my view of the man was obstructed by the open hatch door as it lay on top some contraption... the gas canisters perhaps?

I ducked down with Dave and Jeff. "I got the cop's gun. He has knife in his head. The big guy is over there," I pointed, "but I can't get a shot."

Dave said, "how many bullets?"

I glanced down, "I think 3? No, 4."

Dave whispered, "we could get under him and try to shoot him through the floor."

We heard the large man groan and move closer the hatch. I aimed the gun in the direction from which I thought he might appear.

Dave left the stairs and was circling around underneath where he thought the man might be.

We heard the clanking of metal canisters and I watched a large cylindrical container get pulled towards where I knew the man to be. I aimed through the hatchway door and fired a shot.

The sound was deafening and the kickback from the small gun was much more than I was expecting. My ears rang and there was a sharp pain in my wrist.

There was silence form the other side of the open hatch door, and

then movement- more frantic this time. I heard cursing and something that sounded like the valve of a garden hose turning.

The hissing sound returned. The gas again! Jeff and Dave both dashed to the top of the stairs with me. We all tried dislodging the iron bars.

Without words we synchronized our motions: pushing, pulling, twisting, jarring- until finally it gave. Not much, just an inch. We couldn't tell what had moved, we just knew that when we pulled on the iron bars now, they would all shift back and forth.

All the while, an ominous hissing filled the air. I felt as though we were trapped in a snake pit. I could smell it a little now- the strange odor that had overtaken me earlier. I stuck my face up to the bars and inhaled a lung-full of the untainted air. Dave and Jeff followed suit.

We all ripped fiercely at the bars, and at last I could see the whole clever device as it was pried from the basement ceiling. It must have been 8 to 10 feet long. Dave saw it too, but he must have understood something that I did not because he said, "When I pull, you pull."

He took a lungful of good air and ran down the stairs, around to the far end of the contraption. He leapt at it, yanking hard at some unseen element in ceiling. Jeff and I put all our weight on the bars, and at long last, the enormous contraption fell. Dave took a step or two back towards us, but collapsed as the gas overtook him.

I was starting to get tunnel-vision as Jeff and I tried to push the dislodged iron bars and their frame out of the way of the hatch. We did so with moderate success. Half the hatchway was clear. Jeff was in a better position, so he climbed out first. My head was spinning now, as I saw the huge man spring out from his hiding place a clobber Jeff with some sort of wrench.

I was having trouble thinking. I wanted to shoot this man. Where

had I put the gun?!

I didn't see it. There was no time. I needed air.

I pulled myself out of the hatch and inhaled deeply twice. My perceptions were dull because of the gas, and so I did not expect the blow as his boot slammed into my already injured face. I tumbled down the stairs, but found my footing near the bottom. And then- a miracle.

At the foot of the stairs was the revolver. I must have dropped in the frenzy to pry the bars loose. I grabbed for the gun, and involuntarily inhaled a deep breath of the powerful gas.

The world collapsed in around me... I could not see.

But I still felt the gun in my hand and the stairs beneath my feet. I charged upwards shooting wildly into the dark. I heard a grunt, and I felt myself run into the open hatchway door. The exertion was too much, I tumbled forward and down, down, down into nothingness.

When I awoke I was being loaded into an ambulance. I grabbed the arm of paramedic who was lifting me in. "Stop," I said. "My friends? What happened to my friends?"

The paramedic just gave me a sad look and shook her head. They finished loading me in and slammed the doors. I closed my eyes, too weary to think. I drifted back into unconsciousness.

One year later there was a memorial service at my school. I showed up with a girl I'd been seeing for a couple months- a real sweetheart. I think you'd approve. I was wearing my best suit and in my hand was a sweaty piece of paper with my idea of a speech on it.

I walked to the podium, and cleared my throat. I said a few words about how I met Dave, and what a great guy he was. I told them all how he'd charged into a room full of potentially deadly gas, to

help Jeff and me escape from a madman. My voice sounded funny through the speakers. The damage to my face was extensive. I've had two surgeries, one more scheduled for the fall. I look okay, but it's affected the way I talk.

When I was done speaking I walked over to Dave's family and hugged his mother. She didn't want to let me go. Dave's father patted me on the shoulder as he choked back a sob.

I walked back to my seat. "Stop looking around," my girlfriend scolded. I pretended I didn't know what she was talking about.

"You knew he wasn't coming," she said.

"I know," I said.

When we got back to my dorm room, Jeff was waiting on the front steps. The blow he took to the head had knocked out the vision in his left eye. These days he work opaque sunglasses all the time, to hide his wandering eye. I still greeted him with an "ARRRRGGG" or a "Shiver-me-timbers" from the days when he wore an eye patch. Not today though.

"I couldn't go," he said, "I'm sorry."

I nodded and we all went inside.

We heated up some lunch on our contraband hotplate, and turned on the television for some background noise. My girlfriend flipped to the school's own CCTV channel, and watched a report on the memorial. We'd seen the cameras there covering the event live.

The student reporter told our story: Of Dave who gave his life, of Jeff who lost an eye, and any ability he ever had to do long division (which probably wasn't that much of a loss), and of me, and my face.

She went on to mention Officer Stanley Bell, who died that night, leaving a wife and two children.

She talked about the concession stand, and how it was rigged with motion sensors to capture the curious in a dungeon of death. And how the killer had rigged those motion sensors to the telephone lines so that his phone would ring 3 times when someone entered his trap. She talked about the 37 bodies in canvas sacks that had been accumulating since 1957.

And then they showed the artist's rendering of the man I described to her as "a bear of a man". He is still at large, identity unknown. I inhaled slowly and closed my eyes. I tried to remind myself that I was one of the lucky ones.

I went to lay down in my room and take a nap. My girlfriend followed me a minute later, and curled herself around me. She left the light on. I always sleep with the light on.